

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

934

REVIEWED BY _____ DATE _____

CODEL Ryan Shooting Incident - SITREP I

RDS ☐ or XDS ☐ EXT: DATE _____

TS AUTH. _____ REASON(S) _____ 6:00 A.M. November 19

ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☒

D. CLASSIFIED ☐ RELEASABLE ☒

RELEASE DENIED ☐

PA or FOI ☐

At approximately 6:30 p.m. EST, November 18, Embassy Georgetown reported that CODEL Ryan had apparently been attacked while returning from the Peoples Temple Agricultural Community in the remote north west interior of Guyana. Congressman Leo Ryan (D-California) had traveled to Guyana to investigate allegations by relatives that some members of the Peoples Temple Community were being held against their will. Ryan was accompanied by a number of journalists including a TV camera crew from NBC, San Francisco. He was also accompanied by the Deputy Chief of Mission at our Embassy in Georgetown, and by Mark Lane and another attorney who are counsel for the Peoples Temple. The group traveled to Port Kaituma, which is the nearest airstrip to the Peoples Temple Community, by chartered aircraft the afternoon of November 17. They apparently returned to the airstrip the afternoon of November 18, after having spent the night at the Community, accompanied by some six to ten members of the Peoples Temple who wished to defect. The party was in the act of boarding two chartered aircraft which had been obtained for the trip back to Georgetown when one of the supposed defectors in the smaller of the two aircraft produced a gun and began to shoot at other defectors. This aircraft quickly emptied except for a young woman who was seriously wounded.

At the same time a flatbed trailer pulled by a tractor appeared on the airstrip. A number of people, presumed to be Peoples Temple members, in the trailer opened fire on Congressman Ryan and his immediate party who were in the process of boarding the second aircraft. The gunfire also disabled this aircraft so that it could not take off. The first aircraft took off with its own crew, the wounded woman, and the aircrew of the second aircraft, who were able to scramble aboard at the last minute. Early reports on events and casualties were unclear and based entirely on the account of the incident given by the two aircrews when they returned to Georgetown.

The Government of Guyana (GOG) reacted swiftly under the personal direction of the Prime Minister. Unfortunately, the incident at Port Kaituma took place at sundown. Hence, it was impossible for Guyanese reaction forces to go there directly because the airstrip there is unlighted. The force has established itself at an airstrip called Mathews Ridge

approximately 30 miles from Port Kaituma with the intention of moving into the area at dawn. Our Ambassador at Georgetown has been in constant touch with the Prime Minister and the Security forces.

A crisis management team was immediately formed under the direction of Deputy Assistant Secretary Grove and Caribbean Affairs Director Hewitt. The White House situation room, and the National Military Command Center (NMCC) were immediately informed as were Deputy Secretary, the NSC and the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations. The NMCC agreed to provide a C-141 medical evacuation aircraft with full medical compliment. In addition our embassy requested a medical pathologist be on board. The aircraft left Charleston, S.C. at 3 a.m. EST and scheduled to arrive at Georgetown at approximately 8 a.m. EST.

The extent of the casualties is unknown as of 6 a.m. EST but there are indications that Congressman Ryan and at least the NBC camera team may have been killed. In addition, there are alarming indications that members of the Peoples Temple in Guyana are engaging in mass suicide. The Guyanese police report that a woman who ran the Peoples Temple office in Georgetown has murdered her three children and taken her own life. Another Peoples Temple member, who says he escaped from the Temple and walked 20 miles to Mathews Ridge, reported that members of the Temple were taking their own lives, some 200 having done so when he escaped. There are approximately 1100 US citizens resident at the Temple Community.

The possibility exists that Peoples Temple members, numbering some 3,000 in California, may also begin to take their own lives, this course of action having been discussed by them in the past should they believe their sect to be threatened. The Task Force informed the FBI Operations Center of this possibility at 2:23 a.m. EST (Agent Rasher) and suggested that the relevant law enforcement agencies be informed, especially the police forces in San Francisco and Los Angeles where the Peoples Temple membership is concentrated. In addition, the Department Operations Center informed the San Francisco police directly and requested that they pass on the information to the Attorney General of the State of California.

Our Ambassador has made clear to Prime Minister Burnham that our concerns are (1) that the GOG make every effort to get into Port Kaituma to furnish aid, assistance,

and protection to Americans who may still be there; (2) that as soon as possible the bodies of the dead should be brought to Georgetown; and (3) that the perpetrators of this outrage be brought to justice as soon as possible.

The Crisis Task Force and the Embassy at Georgetown have been deluged with media inquiries throughout the night. We understand that one network has chartered a Learjet to take a camera and reporting crew into Georgetown in the morning. Others will most certainly follow. Our Embassy will clearly need additional Administrative and Counselor support, especially if mass suicides of U.S. citizens are taking place, and we are developing contingency plans to provide it.